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Maryland Soldiers divert car bomb, save lives

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TAJI, Iraq – Sometimes Soldiers perform best when they are in the most stressful situations.

That was true of troops from B Company, 1st Battalion, 115th Regiment, 29th Infantry Division on the morning of Aug. 28.

Through quick and decisive action, the Maryland National Guard Soldiers diverted a car bomb from its intended target and saved many lives.

According to B Co. commander, Capt. Brian S. Borakove, an Arlington, Va., native, Soldiers from his company's 1st Platoon were conducting a mounted patrol when they noticed a suspicious vehicle driving through the town of Saba Al Bor.

B Co. runs patrols in the area around the clock and has become very familiar with the residents and traffic patterns.

"By 'living' there, you know what should and shouldn't be there," Borakove said.

The platoon leader, 1st Lt. Michael Kirtland, from Burtonsville, Md., decided to search the car and another car traveling with it. He directed the drivers to pull to the side of the road.

When the Soldiers were preparing to search the rear car, the driver detonated the explosives-laden vehicle.

The dismounted Soldiers were wounded and their vehicle became a burning hulk.

Their comrades sprang into action, securing the area and aiding the wounded.

"One of the guys ran through a cloud of black smoke, found his buddy, pulled him to safety and started treatment," said Sgt. 1st Class Patrick M. Carey, platoon sergeant for 1st Plt. and a Silver Spring, Md., resident. "Everybody did a great job. The lieutenant's driver (Spc. Ernest Miller IV, from Baltimore) was still working the radio while the vehicle was on fire."

Kirtland pulled the vehicle's gunner out of the burning humvee.

If the Soldiers hadn't stopped the two cars, "it would have been a mass casualty incident," Carey said. "The cars were completely destroyed, so we know they were packing a lot of explosives."

"We believe (the car bomber) was headed to another target," Borakove said. "I believe the Soldiers on the patrol saved the lives of others at checkpoints in the area."

The senior leaders of the company praised the performance of their troops.

"Our Soldiers performed well during crisis," said 1st Sgt. Donald R. Connolly, from Silver Spring, Md. "Their training and skill showed through, and they all made us very proud."

"I'm extremely proud of how they handled themselves after contact with the enemy," Borakove said. "Their actions showed the great confidence they have in each other."

The two Soldiers wounded in the attack were evacuated to a medical facility in Germany and are recovering from their wounds.

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TAJI, Iraq – Spc. Douglas S. Wilson, a College Park, Md., native and gunner for B Company, 1st Battalion, 115th Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, Maryland National Guard cleans his M-249 machine gun before a patrol near Camp Taji. Wilson's company helped divert a car bomber on Aug. 28 near Saba Al Bor, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Matthew Wester, 3-1 AD PAO)

Photo available upon request